

## ABSTRACT

The invention integrates a plurality of separate stack switches into a unified system of switches under a common configuration and management architecture. The switches, preferably stack switches, may be distributed throughout a local area network (LAN) and need not be co-located. One preferred embodiment supports fail-safe operations to minimize the disruption caused when a stack switch becomes inoperative. In another preferred embodiment, the stack switches are enabled with a system-wide address table and quality of service mapping matrix with which each switch can effectively provision system bandwidth.